

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Appropriations Committee
March 2, 2015**

**IN SUPPORT OF
Department of Housing (DOH) budget items
in Governor's proposed FY 2016-17 biennial budget**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals who live with mental health conditions and parents and family members of individuals living with mental health conditions. I am writing to you today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to support investments in the Department of Housing in the Governor's proposed FY 2016-17 biennial budget, specifically investments in supportive housing.

Supportive housing is permanent, independent and affordable housing that is combined with individualized services and supports which may include case management, employment and other services and supports. This evidence-based and cost-effective approach is a solution for individuals with complex health conditions and disabilities, including mental health conditions. Besides being a solution for our neighbors who deal with health conditions to prevent or exit homelessness, it is also a solution for the state and taxpayers by saving money. Supporting people to live successfully in the most integrated setting, the community, ends individuals' experience with homelessness and drastically reduces utilization of high-level/high-cost settings such as emergency rooms, hospitals, prisons and other institutions.

We strongly support the Governor's proposals which continue his and the legislature's commitment to ending homelessness by providing safe, affordable and supportive housing for the residents of Connecticut. Having a home to call your own is one of the most basic human needs and should be a reality for every person in Connecticut. We are on our way but need to be diligent by continuing investments in housing infrastructure and services and supports.

A large number of the individuals who experience homelessness also experience mental health conditions. Estimates show that a quarter of adults staying in shelters live with a serious mental health condition.¹

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2011). The 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. Retrieved January 16, 2015, from www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2010HomelessAssessmentReport.pdf

Providing these individuals, our neighbors, with housing is the right thing to do and the cost-effective thing to do.

Specifically, we urge you to support the following proposed investments:

- \$1 million in FY 2016 and \$2 million in FY 2017 for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) services and another \$1 million in 2016 and \$2 million in 2017 for Department of Housing (DOH) rental subsidies to support a total of **200 new units of supportive housing related to the Governor's Second Chance Initiative – the Connecticut Collaborative on Re-Entry** (formerly known as FUSE) to serve those who frequently cycle through the criminal justice system and homeless shelter services.
- \$1 million in each year for **wraparound services for individuals who experience chronic homelessness** as part of the Governor's Zero: 2016 initiative.
- **Annualizing wrap-around services for 100 units of supportive housing**
- Maintaining the **Homeless Youth Program**, which supports youth in finding and living in safe, stable housing and with the basic need of housing met, being able to focus on entering young adulthood, working on their education, employment and forging a productive path into their future.

Connecticut is on track to end chronic homelessness by the end of 2016. The proposed investments are a critical part of making this happen. Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. Investments proposed in the budget for permanent supportive housing and other housing solutions and support services save public resources and help individuals and families transition to housing, stability, wellness and hope.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let me know if I can answer any questions for you.

Respectfully,

Daniela Giordano, MSW
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NAMI Connecticut